

**TESTIMONY OF MARISSA ALVES, B.S.,  
EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANT, FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER**

**BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY  
IN OPPOSITION TO H.B. NO. 6386 AN ACT DELAYING IMPLEMENTATION  
OF LEGISLATION RAISING THE AGE OF JUVENILE JURISDICTION  
AND IN SUPPORT OF EXPANSION OF FAMILY SUPPORT CENTERS**

**MARCH 4, 2009**

The Family Support Centers are an integral part of diverting youth from future involvement in the juvenile justice system. The educational consultant has the ability to empower the parents and students. Parents and students need to be reminded of their rights to a free and appropriate education. Many FWSN students coming to us have been labeled and dismissed. In the past, when students started having trouble in school, (i.e., truants) this marked the beginning of the encounter with the juvenile justice system. The Family Support Center intervenes and offers children comprehensive services, allows them to stay in the community and diverts them from detention.

The referrals received by the juvenile court are filed by the school for students who have been truant or defiant of school rules. For the most part, the schools have filed the necessary paperwork and dismissed these students. As an educational consultant, it is our job to review the records, meet with the family and initiate the meetings with the schools and find out where the breakdowns occurred. The educational consultant has the arduous job of fighting for the rights of our clients. Our clients have the right to free and appropriate education no matter what has happened to them in the past. They have the right to feel good about themselves and need a chance to make things better. The Family Support Center allows our clients an opportunity to have their needs met in a positive atmosphere vs. further involvement in the juvenile justice.

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The Family Support Centers serve as a checks and balances in the school systems. The educational consultants provide a crucial service to our youth at risk. These services may include advocating for proper educational placement, request for academic and psychological testing, and/or helping parents navigate the educational system.

Success Stories

One of our clients came to us as a FWSN filed by the school. The school administrator claimed she did all she could. All the necessary phone calls home were made, the truant officer visited the home a multitude of times, mom was fined and the FWSN was finally filed by the school. Yet, this child was on her way to repeating 6<sup>th</sup> grade for the third time. The child was constantly skipping class and when she did attend school, spent most of her time hiding in the bathroom. As the educational consultant, I met with the family, made appointments to view records and came up with an educational plan. After reviewing the records, this child qualified to be tested for Special Education services. The school administration was up in arms. They felt it was strictly a behavior problem and testing would

be a waste of their time. The educational consultant helped mom write a letter to request testing. With much resistance, the school had to test this child. Well, as it turns out, she qualified for Special Education services. Mom was in tears, because she felt the school should have known to test her. Mom trusted in the school system to do right by her child, they are the experts. Now it all made sense to mom, the child always have a hard time at home processing information. Mom felt bad because this got her in trouble many times. This would have been a child to most likely drop out of school and wind up further in the juvenile justice system because she was not receiving the services she needed to be successful in school. Presently, she is in an Excel program completing 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade combined. She is also receiving Special Education services and will be in 8<sup>th</sup> grade next year. She is passing and attending school regularly.

Here is another child that the Family Support Center was able to help. The educational consultant followed the standard procedure of meeting with the family, making appointments at the school and coming up with an educational plan. This child had a 504 plan that was clearly not meeting his educational needs. He was constantly being suspended usually 5 to 8 days at a time. The school had performed testing, but claimed he did not meet the criteria for Special Education services. They claimed he was defiant and was choosing his behavior. At one of the meetings, we presented the JJIE report, with permission from the judge, and the school claimed that it clearly stated the report was inflated. One thing we all agreed on was that this school was not meeting his educational needs. The parents and I toured two schools. One of the two was a therapeutic day school. The school the district recommended had no track record. Once the students left the alternative school there was no way to measure whether the placement was successful. Did this population wind up in detention or did they learn the necessary skill to make it back to their district schools? The school did not agree on the therapeutic day school. The therapeutic day school agreed to take the child without the special education label. They agreed to conduct further testing. The Director of Special Education suggested we have a meeting with the Superintendent. At that meeting, the school district stood by their decision and the parents held on to the therapeutic day school choice. The Superintendent stated that he would talk to the Director of Special Education, and if the didn't come to an agreement, they would call the state and request a mediator. The Superintendent called the family later that day and agreed to allow the child to attend the therapeutic day school. This child is currently in the appropriate placement, attending school regularly and is currently an honor student.

Respectfully submitted,

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